104-10129-10382

Star 11/10/67

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JFK ACT RELEASE

PHIL M. CANALE JR.
The prosecutor

W. PRESTON BATTLE
The judge

JAMES EARL RAY
The defendant

Ray's Trial to Open Tuesday In the Slaying of Dr. King

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (UPI) — James Earl Ray goes on trial Tuesday for the slaying April 4 of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and — in one of the strangest cases on record — the question of whether he did or did not kill the civil rights leader is almost secondary.

The focal question is: Was the slaying of King the isolated violent act of one man, as the state charges, or the murderous fruition of a conspiratorial plot, with Ray set up as a decoy, as the defense contends?

Three times in five years an assassin's bullets have cut down national leaders — first President John F. Kennedy, then Martin Luther King, then Sen. Robert F. Kennedy.

This is the first time the alleged killer has been brought to trial.

Lee Harvey Oswald, accused of slaying President Kennedy, was killed before he could be tried. Sirhan B. Sirhan, the alleged killer of Sen. Kennedy, is due to come to trial in Los Angeles next month.

The result is that all the nagging doubts about "plot" now focus on the first man to face the assassination charge in open court, a man whose background as habitual criminal, bumbling thief and escaped robber raises the big questions:

Why would a man like James Earl Ray murder such a man as Martin Luther King?

Was there a conspiracy and if so, who were the conspirators and where are they now?

There is a small television camera in the hall outside County Courtroom 3, where the trial will be held. Anybody who goes in that courtroom has to be recorded, picture and voice, by a camera. Memphis is not taking chances; it is determined that one way or another this case will be settled, and that everybody involved stays alive until it is.

The jury will settle only whether Ray was the sniper who just before dusk, at 6:01 p.m. CST Thursday, April 4, put a .30-36 caliber rifle slug through the throat of the Nobel peace prize winner. A decision is not likely before Christmas.

Whether the question of conspiracy will be answered may depend on Ray himself, if he takes the stand, if he knows anything and, if he does, whether he will talk.

Clark Sees No Plot

The government says there is no puzzle to unravel. Atty. Gen. Ramsey Clark assured the world the day after King was shot that one man, acting alone, was responsible.

Prosecutor Phil Canale, the Shelby County (Memphis) attorney general who has not argued to a jury in seven years, has had his case drawn for him by the Justice Department and the FBI.

That case is this:

Ray, alias Eric Starvo Galt, a man with no known history of deep or violent racial prejudice, acting alone for a motive yet unknown, shot King as the advocate of nonviolence stood on the second-floor balcony of the black-owned Lorraine Motel in downtown Memphis.

But chief defense counsel Arthur J. Hanes Sr., 51, will tell the jury he intends to prove a "Communist, left-wing conspira-